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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. WEST).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
November 15, 2011.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ALLEN B. WEST to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2011, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

A NATIONAL REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Americans are understandably frustrated by the political process. Attention has appropriately been directed to the perversion of Senate rules that slow the Senate's legislative process to a crawl with very real consequences for the ability of the Federal Government to function.

Concern has also been expressed about the House of Representatives.

The health care debate revealed the deepest of divisions and some of the most inflammatory language and action in history. The budget battles of the 112th Congress, especially the artificial crisis surrounding meeting our debt ceiling obligations, extend and amplify that trend.

Experts across the political spectrum agree that part of this divisiveness arises from the very nature of congressional districts. Both parties have developed into an art form the ability to manipulate redistricting: packing in partisans of a single party, punishing opponents and protecting incumbents. Just look at the maps published in "Roll Call" this week, the "Top 5 Ugliest Districts: Partisan Gerrymandering 101." Sadly, it's practiced by both political parties. We should all be concerned when politicians have more influence picking their voters than voters have picking their politicians.

Now, some progress has been made to insulate the redistricting process by creating a few independent commissions and some guidelines, but the problems persist. Look at what has happened in Florida to try and circumvent those reforms and, more recently, the actions of Arizona Governor Brewer firing the independent head of the supposedly independent commission. The process remains woefully inadequate, highly politicized and subject to what normal people would regard as political abuse. For many politicians, the temptation to place partisan objectives above the public interest is just too tempting. In the last decade, we saw the culmination of this trend in 2003 when Texas conducted a hyper-partisan, mid-decade, second reapportionment process.

Americans deserve better.

Congressional representation should not be a political blood sport that protects incumbents, disenfranchises legitimate interests and allows people to

achieve with surgical reapportionment what they couldn't do honestly at the ballot box. As we approach the 50th anniversary of the landmark Baker vs. Carr Supreme Court case that required one person/one vote, it's time to revisit that process.

I would propose that we would establish a national commission, composed of ex-Presidents, retired Federal justices, previous congressional leaders, housed in an independent, professional agency, not unlike what Iowa has done successfully for decades. These distinguished and independent experts would establish uniform criteria and congressional district lines for each State to respect the communities of interest—the ethnic, cultural and historic boundaries—rather than just partisan affiliation. Indeed, we may even consider competitiveness to be a positive outcome. It would then be approved by Congress with an up-or-down vote like we do with base closings. We may even fix the outrage that denies American citizens of the District of Columbia, our Nation's capital, voting representation. Congress should enact these proposals now while the abuse of the process is clear in everyone's minds—well before the next Census in 2020.

The ebb and flow of our history has shown that highly political gerrymandering can backfire, that political tides can change. Nobody knows which party is going to be in charge 10 years from now. Having a system that guarantees fairness will guard against the destructive and highly partisan maneuvering that we see now.

Americans deserve better.

When citizens are treated fairly and all politicians play by the same rules, government works better. Meaningful political reform is seldom easy. It takes time to educate the public and policymakers and to refine the concepts. I am hopeful there will be careful consideration of this proposal as a way to make the House of Representatives fair, more representative and

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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